



GOOD BYE TO COSTA RICA...

Alyssa had her first English spelling test before we left, with words like: bug, God, and a. All week long, every day, she asked, "Is it Friday?" The test was on a Friday. That Thursday night after dinner, she said, "I don't feel so good. I don't think I'll be able to go to school tomorrow and take that spelling test." Bless her heart. She hasn't yet learned the subtle art of lying.

As you may have heard on the news, Daniel and Jay, who lived across the street from us in Costa Rica, were making the next Star Wars movie, complete with battle scenes, light sabers, a fundraising strategy to finance it, bit parts for girls, choreography....the works. Very cute! But production went on hold due to our move to Venezuela.

Diane became part of a Bible Study the last few months in Costa Rica, with 6 women in a nearby neighborhood. They sang their hearts out for 50 minutes....then started the study! Diane was warmly received, and occasionally led the study time.

While on a language school women's retreat up in the mountains, Diane fell and cut her hand open on a sharp rock. After walking up-hill for 45 minutes back to the lodge, and waiting for the van that took them all back to San José, seven hours later she was at Clinica Biblica getting five stitches. Then, a few days before we left, Jeff had an "invasive non-surgical medical procedure" of a delicate nature. So we left Costa Rica on a medical note....the same way we left the US.

While Diane and the kids were at the Bird Zoo in San José, looking at the peacocks, Daniel said, "Mom, if I were a peacock, I'd spread my feathers for you." Isn't that just the sweetest thing you ever did hear?

We had one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences in December before we left. We went to the Pacific coast of Costa Rica with friends Tim & Mitzi Dungan from USA/Switzerland. After a beach spotter radioed the guide that a Leatherback turtle was coming onto the beach to lay eggs. The guide marched us carefully down the beach with his red flash light until we found her. She was huge! She was digging a 2-foot deep hole with her two back legs. Then she laid about 100 eggs, about the size of tennis balls, white, and spherical. Then she covered them up. There were scientists measuring her and taking readings from a microchip that had been previously implanted. As we walked back down the beach in the dark, we saw glow-in-the-dark little dots washing up from the ocean. They're called "hilo de oro": threads of gold. They're sort of like mini-jelly fish that only come when the water gets colder.



HELLO TO VENEZUELA....

The week we arrived in Venezuela, there was an unusual amount of rain in some areas of the country, especially around Caracas. The airport closed due to flooding, and



Daniel's teacher, Claire is on the left, then Marissa, then Daniel, and Jennifer on Daniel's left.

landslides that took out the only road to it from Caracas. About 120,000 people lost their homes. Many people died. One newspaper article said, "The water gods have put us to the test." The evangelical community is responding with supplies, prayer, and the message of hope in God (capital G).

Caracas is a huge metropolis, with tons of high-rise buildings everywhere. If you have been to Manhattan (NYC, not Kansas), you can envision what Caracas looks like. It's very different from Costa Rica in many respects. The accent is VERY different. They drop a lot of letters in the middle and at the end of words -- it's hard to understand. People don't walk around here, and in the middle class areas there aren't many houses (mostly apartments with parking garages), so it's hard to meet people. It's much like Manhattan, but without the busy sidewalks. We miss Costa Rica! On the positive side, there aren't many potholes in the roads. And you can find many north american consumer products here, but NOT cheddar cheese. Ouch!

Our apartment is in a "neighborhood" called Santa Fe. Our apartment building is one of many on the same guarded cul-de-sac, a very congested area. The only other building on the cul-de-sac besides the high-rise apartment buildings is a Montessori school. (We are hoping to get Daniel and Alyssa in there in January.)

Keys, keys, keys. This is the drill to get into our apartment. We stick a key card into a slot at the start of the cul-de-sac to drive in. Then our key ring has a remote control to open the barred entrance gate to the underground garage. Once the car is parked, the pedals are locked up with a special metal floor panel. Then we lock the car doors. There is a key to get into the elevator lobby. Then, inside the elevator, there is a plastic key that is inserted to enable the floor buttons to be pushed. On our floor, we have a barred gate in front of our apartment door with two locks on it, and two locks on our actual front door. Ten security devices in all. Whew! But it's just a way of life in Caracas.

We are grateful for our apartment here on the 13th floor. When you first come in, you're in our big dining room. Daniel and Alyssa each have their own room, and there's a bathroom in between their rooms. The kitchen is rectangular, but twice as wide and twice as long as the one in Costa Rica. There's an extra little room that we'll call the home-school room off the back of the kitchen. Our computer and books fit nicely in a little closet-sized room off the dining room. We're on the corner of the building -- there are four apartments per floor. Our living room window is like a picture window, with a little one foot deep planter all along the edge. There are a couple little trees growing there and some other plants. Actually, the windows don't come all the way down, so that part of the dirt is inside and most is outside.

Of the kids, by the kids, and for the kids...

Daniel:


It's a lot different in Venezuela than it was in Costa Rica, because we live on the 13th floor, and we never have before. It's a lot different being way up high, where you can see down on everything -- everything is a lot littler than it usually is. We go to different places almost every day. There are lots of things that there are in the United States. We have been to two parks. Alyssa found a trail. I hope we go there again some time soon. Most of this week my dad will be in the office working. While he's working, mom, Alyssa, and I will be doing home school -- until January 10th. Then we will be doing home school and Spanish school. I like it here, and I hope I make a couple friends. And I hope I learn more Spanish here.


Alyssa:


We are watching a soccer game out of our window with binoculars. There are four colors of uniforms: white, red, blue, and green. We might get a pet -- maybe or maybe not. We went to a church building today. We found some people to help us do stuff, like find yummy restaurants. We hope you feel good, that you're not sad about us leaving. I miss all my friends. I lost a tooth!

A DAY IN THE LIFE....


December 15 was election day, when Venezuelans voted to approve a new constitution. Some highlights from that day:

 We found a teeny lizard on the dish-drainer, and a 3" slug on our bathroom floor. I guess we're not exempt from wild-life even way up here!


 We withdrew 100,000 Bolivars, the currency here, and found that it didn't get us through the day.


 Alyssa went to the dentist, which cost about what a meal at McDonald's costs here.

 We got our new vehicle, a 2000 Ford Ranger double-cab.

 There were soldiers with rifles in the mall at which we ate supper, in case the voting results caused unrest.

 Alyssa lost her first tooth!

 There was a casarola during the president's TV speech (public banging of pots and pans). He's not all that popular with the middle and upper classes.

 And seven provinces went under a state of emergency due to flooding and landslides.

Alex, we'll look for the new stars here.

News from Jeff & Diane


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"It Takes a Village...."


Still highlighting the contributions of some of our friends, because it takes a community of people to successfully prepare, move, and support a family going overseas to serve.

 Todd & Christine Hamilton of Omaha, Nebraska for regular prayer support for Jeff, Daniel, and Alyssa

 Kevin & Betsy Horn of Lincoln, Nebraska for advice from a son of former Venezuelan missionaries, babysitting while we were getting ready to leave the US, and regular prayer support for Diane, Daniel, and Alyssa

 Jim & Kathy Jenkins of Lincoln, Nebraska for dental advice in preparation for living overseas, and "other help" as well

 Jack Knickman of Lincoln, Nebraska for the jobs, including the one he didn't take, giving Jeff valuable experience

 Michelle Kroeker of Lincoln, Nebraska for making Daniel so welcome during his short time in her first grade class, understanding the life he was about to embark upon, and helping him prepare for it

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